

<b>LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT</b>
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**LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** The Rice Hotel  
**OWNER:** Houston Housing Finance Corporation  
**APPLICANT:** Randall Davis Company, agent  
**LOCATION:** 917 Texas Avenue, aka 518 Main Street -  
 Main Street/Market Square Historic District  
**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** Jan-12-97

**AGENDA ITEM:** IIIa  
**MEETING DATE:** Feb-13-97  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 97L016  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Jan-03-97  
**HEARING DATE:** Feb-13-97

**SITE INFORMATION**

Lots 1, 2, 6 through 10, 12, Tracts 3A, 11A, Block 57, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas, being three parcels consisting of 125' X 250'; 25' X 150'; and 100' X 100' (site of old annex-demolished in 1997), containing 45,000 square feet. The building on the site is the 18-story, brick Rice Hotel on Texas Avenue between Main and Travis Streets. The non-contributing 5-story, Rice Hotel annex and motor lobby at the corner of Prairie Avenue and Travis Street (currently being demolished) will be replaced with a compatible parking garage which will be non-contributing to the district.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Rice Hotel was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 23, 1978 under criterion "A" and "C" (Reference No. 78002947). It was also designated as a contributing building to the Main Street/Market Square Historic District when the district was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 18, 1983 (boundary expanded and approved February 23, 1984). The District constitutes Houston's largest, most nearly intact accumulation of physical resources representing the city's civic and commercial past. The surviving architecture documents the episodes of development which occurred between Reconstruction and the building and real estate boom of the 1920s, the half century when Houston emerged from relative obscurity to become the largest city in the southern United States. Connected with many of these buildings and places are the personalities and institutions which were instrumental in promoting the city's political and commercial advancement.

The Rice Hotel, one of the most advanced and best known Texas hotels since its opening in 1913, stands on a site occupied from 1837-1839 by the first Capitol of the Republic of Texas. Since 1841, the property has been used exclusively for hotels, with the exception of a brief period in 1842 when it was again the site of the Texas Capitol. The new Capitol was completed in April, 1837 which continued to be used for public functions until 1841. It later became known as the Capitol Hotel, later being called the Houston House and Barnes House (1877). It was demolished in May 1881 when a new 5-story, brick and stucco hotel was constructed there. It became known as the Capitol Hotel. After it was purchased by William Marsh Rice, the Hotel became known as the Rice Hotel. It continued to be operated as the Rice until 1911 when Jesse Jones purchased the building. He demolished the old building and obtained a permit to construct a new hotel on the site on February 12, 1912.

Jesse Jones, a Houston entrepreneur, was a financial wizard who not only built the Rice Hotel but also many of the prominent commercial buildings which surrounded it. In 1932, Jones was appointed to the head of the Federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation and subsequently served a President's wartime

Secretary of Commerce. Until his death in 1956, Jones was heavily involved in the promotion and development of Houston, and his many contributions to the city and to the State of Texas remain legendary in scope.

The Rice Hotel officially opened its doors on May 17, 1913. It was boasted as a modern fireproof hotel costing \$2.5 million. It was one of the first multi-story buildings constructed with a skeletal steel frame. The exterior was clad with brick veneer. The 18-story building was originally designed as a hotel in 1913. The central and east wings were part of the original 1913 building designed by the architectural firm of Mauran, Russell and Crowell of St. Louis, Missouri. The Rice Hotel Cafeteria, which opened in 1922, was the first air-conditioned public room in Houston. The entire hotel became air-conditioned in 1947. In 1921 Jones retained Alfred C. Finn of Houston to design alterations for Jones seventeenth floor apartment at the Rice. This was Finn's first work on the hotel, and his association with Jones continued over a period of many years. The west wing was a 1924-25 addition also designed by Finn. The west wing, almost indistinguishable from the two earlier wings in scale and detailing, gave the hotel its present day "E" shape. During the course of this project, the cast iron canopy was carefully extended with ironwork produced at the Herzog Iron Works of St. Paul, Minnesota. The terra cotta trim for the wing was provided by the Atlanta Terra Cotta of East Point, Georgia.

Finn, known as the "Builder of Houston," he designed such projects as the Gulf Building, the San Jacinto Monument, the Sam Houston Coliseum, Sakowitz Brothers Store, Bankers Mortgage Building, State National Bank Building, the Commerce Building extension, U of H Ezekiel W. Cullen Administration Building, Lamar Hotel, Lowe's Theatre, Metropolitan Theatre, the Shrine Crippled Children's Hospital and the City National Bank, which was recently designated by City Council as a Houston Landmark.

The building exhibits a decorative cast iron canopy supported by turned cast iron columns and extends the full facade of the building on Texas Avenue as well as Main Street. A matching second floor canopy forms a gallery over the main entrance to the lobby on the Texas Avenue side. At the second level is a series of arched openings (sealed with stucco in 1947) supporting a frieze and cornice formed by the decorative third floor. The main shaft of the building, rising above the three story base course, now appears in the shape of an "E" formed by the three projecting wings. From the fourth floor level to a stringcourse above the fourteenth floor, the building is of dark buff brick, with a quoined terra cotta trim around the windows on all major facades. A frieze and cornice for the entire building is formed by a highly decorative fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth floors. Originally an open-air, pergola-covered roof garden graced the top floor and was used for dining and dancing. It was replaced with a steel, glass and masonry eighteenth floor in 1951 by the architects, Staub, Rather and Howze of Houston. It was used as the Petroleum Club of Houston.

#### **RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:**

Due to various remodelings which have taken place in every decade since the construction of the earliest portion of the hotel (1913), very little remains of the original interiors. Those elements which do remain have been combined with other motifs to create a notable eclectic quality throughout the public areas of the Rice. The functions of the space, however, were largely unchanged from the time the hotel opened in 1913 until its closing on August 23, 1977. The building has had as many as 1000 guest rooms and suites, two enormous ballrooms and facilities for five restaurants, a beauty salon, barber shop and a variety of small retail spaces.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Archaeological & Historical Commission

## Planning and Development Department

On July 18, 1996 the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) approved a certificate of appropriateness for the demolition of the non-contributing Rice Hotel annex and motor hotel at the corner of Prairie and Travis Street. The annex, designed by J. Russ Baty, of Houston, had been added to the hotel in 1958. Plans are to replace the building with a compatible parking garage for the newly restored Rice Hotel.

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION....:

#### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

**S D NA**

**S - satisfies    D - does not satisfy    NA - not applicable**

- (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

#### STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends designation of the Rice Hotel as a Landmark to the Planning Commission since the application complies with the criteria in the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

SITE LOCATION MAP

917 TEXAS AVENUE

NOT TO SCALE

